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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the status of library services in Natal, South Africa. Fragmented services dominate the area, with public, urban, and school libraries existing in complete autonomy from each other and ambivalent about each other's existence. Within school libraries, provision of services varies widely and reflects the wider apartheid structure of privilege that is racially defined. This difference is found in all elements of a school library service--materials, staff, accommodation, organization, and funding. Provincial libraries, purportedly open now to all citizens of the province, have not provided equal access for blacks, and some town councils have invoked a variety of measures as a means to exclude black users. Urban libraries and provincial libraries both are organized around central libraries which coordinate services in branches and other service points, and provide all training, materials, and funding through their central administration. This structure has contributed to limiting access to library services for many citizens. A number of arguments are presented which support improved distribution of library funds and services to the schools and to public libraries. There is hope that library services will become more coordinated and more equitably distributed. The University of Natal's Durban School Library conference established a historic collaborative group, dedicated to annual meetings to discuss and enhance education and media issues. (Contains 13 references.) (SWC)

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ED 399 941

The Role of the Public Library in Supporting Education in the Natal Region

by
Rookaya Bawa

Introduction

The present provision of library services within the Natal region is highly fragmented and largely ineffective. The public, urban,and school libraries continue to exist in complete autonomy from each other and are ambivalent of each other's existence. Each is funded, staffed and stocked individually. No formal policy exists to inform the funding, staffing or access principles. Neither does any informal arrangement exist between the libraries to collectively service society. The result is a fragmented, under-resourced and ineffective service in the Natal region. However, more recently a few forums have emerged which seem to be initiating discussion between the various library services.

The Status Quo in the Natal Region

In order to adequately investigate the possible relationships or articulation between public, urban, and school libraries, it is essential to briefly review the present status of library provision in the Natal region.

The library resource needs of children have been the responsibility of the formal school sector, with public libraries playing a supportive role in the extra-curricular needs of the child and in an incidental fashion the curricular needs as well. It is perceived that the curricular needs of the child should be served by each of the education departments of which in the South African context there are ± 15[1].

However, in South Africa the formal school provision of media resources has not materialized uniformly in the different education departments[2]. In fact provision of media and resources in the schools reflects the wider apartheid structure of privilege that is racially defined.

School Libraries

In the Natal region we have five different Education Departments each with its own policy, staff and funding. Each of the five departments has a media services division and each its respective head of department. The five departments are the Natal Education Department (NED), Department of Education and Training (DET), Department of Education and Culture (DEC), House of Delegates (HOD) and House of Representatives (HOR). Each is attempting to staff, stock, establish and provide a media service to the children it is responsible for. Each has worked in complete autonomy of the other.

> The provision of school library media services to schools differs from one education department to the next. Some departments having excellent building and stock, while other departments have nothing that could vaguely be called a library. These differences appear to exist among schools within the same department, and then too within the same geographic area.[3]

School libraries reflect the wider racial stratification of South African society, with historically "white" schools being better provided for than so called "black" schools. Overduin and De Wit (1986) conducted a detailed review of school libraries in secondary schools of seven different education departments, "with regard to the basic elements of a school library service that is materials, staff, accommodation, organization, and funds."[4] They found that black schools were substantially lacking provision when compared to their white counterpart schools. In Natal, for example, white schools had 12.8 books per child while black schools had 2.4 books per child.[5]

A subsequent study done by Vermeulen (1990) of three hundred forty primary schools in the Durban and Pietermaritzburg area further substantiated the De Wit and Overduin findings of vast discrepancies with respect to school library provision.[6]

Parallel to government schools in Natal, we have a host of private schools with superb library facilities which will compare favorably with the best in the world. Examples of those are Wickham Collegiate, Hilton College, and Michaelhouse.

READ (Read, Educate and Develop) a non-governmental organization is also attempting to establish and support libraries

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with the help of donor agencies. They supply book and resource boxes to schools and/or individual classrooms. Their efforts are dependent upon funding from donor agencies who target specific areas, schools, or projects.

It is generally accepted that the present arrangement needs to be rationally and radically reviewed where a more coordinated single education department is established and where regional resource sharing and networking is more seriously investigated.

Provincial Libraries

Library provision in the province is governed by the Provincial Library Ordinance, the Natal Ordinance Number 52 of 1952. On the basis of motivation the central provincial library administration is granted money and resources to provide a library service to people in the Natal region. However, individual public libraries are established by local municipal authorities who build the physical library plant and pay the salary of the librarian, while the provincial library service undertakes to provide resources and in-service training for the branch librarians periodically. Selection, processing and distribution is centrally coordinated in Pietermaritzburg. Thus the branch libraries are sent block loans from the central branch.

The central provincial library services coordinates the distribution of resources to the respective municipal branch libraries via mobile transport services. Public libraries are not always accessible to people. For instance:

> A survey conducted by Stabbins in 1988, before the scrapping of the Separate Amenities Act, found that access to public libraries for black South Africans was gradually granted from the 1970s and accelerated in the 1980s. While race was removed from the statutes, no provision was made for actualizing the principle of equal access. Some town councils invoked a variety of measures (for example, substantial membership fees, or producing electricity receipts as proof of residence) as a means to exclude black users.[7]

Access to public libraries is not a reality for all. Not all municipalities have provided adequate and sufficient libraries for the respective municipality they serve. Where a service does exist it has been imposed on the people who have had no direct say in terms of where the library is to be built, what stock is to be kept, and who is to run the library. Some areas have libraries and some don't. What they have is what they were given not what they chose to have.

Urban Public Libraries

Urban public libraries fall outside of the provincial library arrangement. They consist of libraries that opted to remain independent when the provincial library service was established. The following urban libraries are independent libraries: Bloemfontein, Durban, Germiston, Johannesburg, Cape Town, East London, Pietermaritzburg, Port Elizabeth, and Pretoria.

> In each of these cities a municipal public library service functions within its own special network which, besides a central library, provides for branch libraries acting as service points in the suburban areas. As in the provincial library organization, in the central library of each, material is prepared and distributed to various service points. The main difference is that the central organization itself also functions as a service point, and that the whole service is controlled and financed as a single department of the municipality.[8]

Urban public libraries are based in the urban areas of South Africa, ignoring the majority of our population which is rural based.

In some areas, public libraries, urban libraries, and school libraries seem to be providing overlapping resources and services to the same clientele in some instances, i.e. children that live within a geographic area that have a school library, urban library, and a public library in their area. While one acknowledges that the above is possible it is by no means indicative of the Natal region. The reality is to the contrary. The average child experiences neither the public library, the school library, nor the urban library because none of the above is accessible to most children.

A Possible Way Forward

The provision of effective library service will require the establishment of a process aimed at the formulation of policy which will focus on issues such as, among others:

(i) effective articulation of the three systems described above,
(ii) principles of access and the need to widen access to those sections of our population which have been systematically excluded in the past,
(iii) funding issues,
(iv) staffing issues and in particular, issues pertaining to gender and racial imbalances,
(v) democratization of the governance of libraries and library services, and
(vi) the link between libraries and national development.

It would seem that the various Education Departments should merge into one Department of Education. The question of articulation between the Provincial, urban, and school libraries should be considered with great urgency. The latter has been tried in many countries. Surely, if the Education Departments, Provincial Library services, and the respective urban municipalities talked to rationalize and support one another's initiatives rather than the hit and miss arrangement in existence presently, the service and status of library services would be enhanced.

The infra-structure of a possible partnership is not an impossible idea to contemplate. In fact Ordinance number 5 of 1952 makes the point that the Province can create depots

> ...at a state school, a state aided school or a private school.[9]

Until very recently in the Natal region provincial library services made resources available to schools via block loan arrangements, which ceased in 1970 for white government schools and in 1990 for private schools. Black schools were never serviced by this arrangement. Is it not possible to revitalize the service to serve all schools, given the fact that the ordinance does not exclude services to schools by the provincial library service?

History of Partnership

Up to and until 1970 the provincial library services in the Natal region provided block loans of reading material to white schools in the region. The service ceased when the Natal White Education Department in Natal argued,

> that it would not be in the interests of the Administration or of this Department for the bulk purchase of library books to be arranged by the provincial library services. The right of the Principal and his staff to select books is an essential feature of the school library scheme and this freedom of action and the goodwill of the schools must be preserved at all times...[10]

Further,

> the academic revolution which had and was still taking place made it necessary for the Education Department to utilize all available resources to increase the efficiency of the teaching service. The requirements of all the different types of schools will vary radically as will the requirements of the numerous different subjects in these schools. The new differentiated education about to be introduced will increase the big differences in resources needed to provide for the additional expected differences...[11]

On the basis of the above arguments The Acting Directing of Library Services in the Natal region made the following resolution:

First,

> that the Natal Education Department should assume full responsibility for all the matters relating to books for government school libraries with immediate effect.

Second,

> the Administrative action regarding the writing off and taking charge of school library books by the Provincial Library Services and the Education Department respectively be carried out immediately.[12]

Private schools continued to receive block loans from Provincial Library Services until 1990. Mrs Van De Riet[13] stated that the service was terminated because it was felt that it was wrong to service only private schools, and if the service is to be offered it should be to all schools. The arguments raised are valid if one

has the funding to establish school libraries in all Natal schools and stock the respective libraries adequately. However, Donaldson (1992) makes the point that

> Government spending on education in south Africa (including the "homelands") comprised 23.6% of the total government spending in 1990, or about 7.1% of the Gross National product. These figures are high by international standards...and the government cannot be expected to commit substantially increased resources to education. Although economists will differ on the details, there is widespread agreement that the levels of taxation cannot be significantly increased at present, and that job creation, improved urban and industrial infrastructure, and direct poverty relief are priority areas alongside education in fiscal reform. Government also has a role to play in renewing vocational education and training, which have been seriously neglected in recent years. There will be intense competition amongst these and other ends for such savings in government spending which might result from reduced defense and apartheid-related spending. While the economy continues to stagnate as it has in recent years, it may be necessary to restrict increases in state spending on education to as little as 2% per year in real terms.[14]

Thus the expected money to establish media centers in each and every school, although ideal will not materialize in the near future. Does this mean that a whole generation will not be provided with books?

Hope

Kwa-Zulu Schools Project

In the Natl region the seeds of partnership have been sown with the establishment of the Kwa-Zulu/Provincial Library project. Kwa-Zulu (DEC) asked Province to help establish libraries in ten schools in the Natal region in 1989. The service to date has been extended to four hundred ninety nine.[15]

Initially DEC was allocated R200,000 to establish school libraries, but with the money allocated it was felt that the box libraries in the READ tradition was the affordable interim answer. Thus boxes and class room collections are distributed by DEC and Provincial library services. For the year 1992/93, R100,000,000 has been allocated.[16]

Province and DEC approached READ with Mrs. Morren's recommendation to make available their reading list to help set up these school boxes. READ refused to supply only the book lists. They supply booklists and training, not the one without the other. So READ was co-opted to help with the task.[17]

Kwa-Zulu has provided the financial resources, while librarians have been seconded by DEC to help with the task. READ and Provincial Library Services have provided the expertise, infrastructure, and support for the initiative. The project is presently housed at the central provincial library services building in Pietermaritzburg.

The project is but a beginning that is hoped will materialize to include more schools and a wider geographic area. It must be hoped that other education departments are included in the project and that the service is expanded to include many, many more schools than are presently being served.

Networking

Regional cooperation with respect to the sharing of resources and expertise among schools was raised at the University of Natal's Durban School Library conference. As a result of that demand and the Education Foundation's suggestion that people working with media should meet to discuss education and media, Sally Ballard and I established a rather historic collaborative group. The Media Forum was established. It consists of the Heads of the Education Media Services from the five education departments in the Natal Region. The group has representation from the Provincial Library Services Division, READ, the Education Foundation, Kwa-Zulu school's based/box project and me.

Meetings are usually held every two months. Members raise issues that they need advice on, e.g. DEC was in the process of drawing plans for new school libraries in some of their schools, and the plans were viewed and improved upon by the group in the light of experiences and expertise that each in the group

had. The group has worked and is working on a number of projects collectively in the region. The following are a few examples of joint efforts embarked on:

First, a register of all schools in the Natal region has been started and all the information is being fed to Dolsie Kriger of the Education Foundation who is busy mapping the respective schools in the Natal region.

Second, a draft working document on policy with respect to school library media services is being drawn up for comment.

Third, the Education Media heads have begun discussion with Provincial Library Services on possible areas of cooperation between schools and Provincial Library Services.

Fourth, READ and I have been asked to investigate the possibility of coordinating a series of in-service workshops for teachers in the region. A draft document with ideas for in-service workshops is circulating for discussion and comment.

Fifth, the Forum has been actively writing letters to various institutions and departments challenging the opening of their services to all departments of education. One such success story is the opening of the Indian Teachers centers to all teachers irrespective of which Department they work for. However, the group needs to widen its constituency to include Urban Libraries and to have a more accountable constituency that is able to affect the necessary changes needed.

NEPI/Trans LIS

The National Education Coordinating Committee (NECC) has produced a number of discussion documents pertaining to policy on education in South Africa. As a result, a document relating to libraries has been produced. A group of individuals and organizations felt that the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) document commissioned by the NECC had to be taken forward and this led to the establishment of the Transforming Library and Information Services Group (Trans LIS). The group consists of a wide range of organizations and individuals that are hoping to work together towards common professional ends of investigating and hopefully impacting on policy in the region.

Forums

Resource centers within organizations in Natal have come together to create the Natal Resource Centre Forum.

These are but a few examples of partnerships in the Natal region but nevertheless a significant beginning towards a shared professional goal of common community resource service.

Conclusion

We seem to have reached the point where it's almost possible to arrange a bosberaad on media services in the Natal region, to impact on policy formulation, and to create a more rational and effective service for the region as a whole. However, these initiatives described above are not sufficient in themselves to take the process forward.

A process has to be put into place which has as its primary goal the drawing together of 'experts' and the large formations of civil society to establish a policy formulation exercise which is representative and has legitimacy. The questions of articulation and access are difficult but tractable. The cooperation examples described above may represent the roots of such a process.

Notes

1 Christie, P. *The Right to Learn: The struggle for education in South Africa*. Cape Town: Sached Trust/Ravan Press, 1991. p101.

2 SAILIS/Lambert Wilson Review Workshop. General consensus amongst all the presenters. 1992.

3 School library Conference proceedings. University of Natal, PMB. 1992. p54.

4 Overduin, P.G.J. and De Wit, N. *School Librarianship in South Africa, a Critical Evaluation: Secondary Education*. Bloemfontein: University of the Orange Free State, 1986.

5 Ibid.

6 Vermeulen, W.M. "South African School Libraries and Standards." *South African Journal of Library and Information Science*. 59(2), 1991.

7 *Library and Information Services: Report of the NEPI Library and Information Services Research Group, a Project of the National Education Coordinating Committee*. Cape Town: Oxford Press, 1992.

8 Malan, S I. *Library and Information Services: a General Orientation*. Durban: Butterworth, 1978.

9 Natal Ordinance 5 of 1952.

10 Natal Education Departments Minutes and Records of the Library Media Department, 1970.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Van de Riet, A. Discussion during meeting between Province and media heads. Pietermaritzburg. 1993.

14 Donaldson, A. R. NEPI Draft Documentation Paper, 1992.

15 Beecham, L. Personal Communication on the Kwa-Zulu project, 1993.

16 Ibid.

17 Tomlinson, J. Personal communication, 1993.